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ABSTRACT

A number of studies consistently identify the importance of communication skills, both oral and written, as vital to employability. Speech communication departments, however, have been slow either in responding to industry's needs or in informing students of the high correlation between communication skills and employability. Some of the possible obstacles to restructuring the curriculum to include a communication training course or program are (1) instructors' doubts about their ability to develop and teach the courses, (2) the assumption that training techniques are only a fad, and (3) the belief that concern with the nonacademic career relevance of education will not enrich the discipline's scholarly and educational activities. Broadening the scope of traditional approaches to speech education curricula can produce students who are better able to meet the need for communication education in business and industry. The focus of the traditional speech methods courses could be expanded to include units on conducting seminars, workshops, and comprehensive training programs. In addition, existing courses in organizational communication could be expanded to include a unit on training and development. Emphasis could be placed on topics unique to human resource training. By thus changing the curricula, the communication educator can become more prevalent in industry. (HOD)

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A RATIONALE FOR DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION TRAINING PROGRAMS: ISSUES AND RESOURCES FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

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A RATIONALE FOR DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION TRAINING PROGRAMS: ISSUES AND RESOURCES FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Symbiotic relationships are not new. In the plant kingdom we see algae and fungi jointly colonize rocks. Ants and aphids have worked out reciprocal relationships. The golden plover and alligator survive collectively and benefit from the favors each grants to the other. Moreover, animals of the same species cooperate in joint ventures. The geese winging their way north and south at appointed times every year each take a turn at breaking the headwinds. A herd of deer break snowdrifts in much the same fashion. A school of goldfish can often ward off a toxic agent a single goldfish cannot withstand. Musk ox, when threatened by carnivorous predators, form a star-shaped pattern with rumps to the center to fend the attack of the marauding foe.[1] Does it not, then, seem reasonable that we human educators and trainers cooperate for our mutual advantages as well? After all, we have superior intellect, a recorded history of lessons from the past, and give lip-service, at least, to the notion of the benefits of heterogeneity in our deliberations. Why is it that a natural enmity readily surfaces when someone has the audacity to suggest a pooling of resources between teachers and trainers--between education and vocation? Can Instructional Development and Applied Communication collectively spawn a more capable product that can survive the seductive whispers of multidigit salaries, while at the same time adhering to academic discipline? Is there a middle ground, a touchstone, a connective link between the theoretical orientation of the researcher teacher and the training orientation of the practitioner? Ricks,[2] Cushing[3] and

Rudolph and Johnson[4] are among many who have noted major problems for persons crossing the boundary from teaching to training.

We believe a suitable marriage can and should take place between students of instructional development and students of applied communication to yield a product that can better meet the awesome demands of industry for quality communication training. Thus, it is the purpose of this paper to (1) present a rationale for developing communication training programs, (2) demonstrate that our communication trained students can meet an existing and growing demand, (3) identify some of the issues that must be resolved, (4) include some stereotypes that may well need to be set aside for such an exciting assembly effect to emerge, and (5) suggest approaches for modifying existing curriculum to include an emphasis on communication training.

Training Needs of Industry: A Rationale for Curriculum Development

The demand for training and development activities in business, industry and government agencies has greatly accelerated in the past few years. Observations by Toffler, for example, suggest that business probably spends or will soon spend more money on higher education than higher education. Note a few statements from his most recent work:

> Training is going to be one of the biggest Third Wave industries of all. It will even become a significant export industry . . . I believe, in fact, that we are about to go into the training and retraining business on a tremendous scale. All the high-tech societies will have to pour resources into this activity, whether the task is done by the private sector, the education system, the military, the media, or all the above . . . We've just had a report submitted to the U.S. Congress that argues the lack of a strategy for retraining "is a major barrier to America's economic renewal" . . . These people (trainers) will have to be good "at empathy . . . people who are sensitive managers and organizers" . . . we need "fighters and conciliators and cross-cultural communicators . . ."[5]

Generally gone are the days when training programs were blended with personnel functions and assigned to the newest employee in the department. While human resource development is still widely considered to be one of the many functions of personnel,[6] it is a bona fide, reasonably stable profession recognized for its contribution to organizational effectiveness.[7]

The Role of Communication in Industry

Coupled with the growth of human resource development has been an accompanying increase in the availability of communication training.[8] In a survey of 188 corporations, Lahiff and Hatfield report increased accessibility of communication training.[9]

This observation is also consistent with the findings in a survey of 118 trainers, of which eighty percent noted that their home organizations demonstrated an increased interest in communication training over a ten-year span.[10] Donaldson and Scannell add that increased importance is placed on communication in today's organizational setting because it is the number-one problem in most firms, agencies, and organizations.[11] Indeed, Katz and Kahn argue that "Communication--the exchange of information and the transmission of meaning--is the very essence of a social system or an organization."[12] A recent ASTD National Report references the study, Basic Skills in the U.S. Work Force, which quotes businesses and unions as identifying speaking/listening skills as one of the most frequent deficiencies.[13] Interestingly, the report writer goes on to note the costs of the deficiencies as being astronomical in terms of mistakes made and the need for retraining. Another recent survey commissioned by the SCA Educational Policies Board

clearly documents the importance of communication skills for entry level workers.[14]

Are many of the needs of industry communication-related? To modify an old saying, it may well be not only that "Johnny can't read," but he often can't speak, listen, write, or solve day-to-day problems--at least not well enough to get and hold a job--even with a college diploma.

A fresh college diploma is not a guarantee of employment. Last spring it was reported by the College Placement Council that "only half as many job offers have been made to graduating students this year as were made by the same date last year."[15] With approximately 540,000 college graduates in the 25-64 age group unemployed,[16] 1.4 million students graduating from college last spring,[17] and nearly 15 million more college graduates, mostly women, entering the labor force during the present decade,[18] graduates need to take special note of what can be done to enhance their employability. The problem is further aggravated by perhaps as much as 80% of the current labor force's feeling underemployed.[19] Thus, with those without jobs seeking them and many with jobs seeking more fulfilling ones, it would appear more than ever that our advisement role with our students concerning employment opportunities and what can be done to enhance employability is critical.

While the technical fields are "taking the licking--chemical, energy related and construction"--these, ironically, are the very fields touted in many circles as the fast growth areas.[20] In a recent, detailed job outlook for 1983, compared to 1982, it was noted there are significant declines projected in chemical engineering, electrical engineering, computer science, civil engineering, physics, business administration, personnel administration, and education. More modest declines were in communications, social sciences, mathematics, hotel and restaurant management, marketing and sales.[21]

A number of studies consistently identify the importance of communication skills, both oral and written, as vital to employability. In a recent survey of top executives, chief executive officers, vice presidents and presidents, some interesting findings resulted. When asked what courses in the study of business administration best prepared persons for careers in general management, the respondents cited oral and written communication as the single most important preparatory tool to their success.[22] David Rockefeller's description of the chief corporate executive for the year 2000 seems congruent with those findings:

> He will be more broadly gauged to deal with the delicate and divergent internal and external forces of the day . . . he will have to be sensitive to public opinion and respectful of the public franchise over which he presides . . . The changing attitudes and aspirations of his work force will test (his) human relations skills . . . he will spend more time lobbying legislators, persuading dissident stockholders, and meeting face-to-face with special-interest groups . . . and perhaps most important, the chief executive in the year 2000 will have a personal responsibility for advocacy, activism, and outspokenness . . . he will be expected to represent articulately and coherently his company and industry to their critics."[23]

Thus, the future, as well as present, role of communication is vital to industry life.

Madeline, referencing a writer in Fortune who discusses a major chemical firm's new public relations program, notes that the company chairman is spending a fourth of his time communicating with governmental, media, and public-interest groups, and that nearly 200 of the firm's managers now are giving speeches, lobbying, writing articles for op-ed pages of newspapers, and speaking out on issues affecting company concerns.[24] Madeline notes:

> The ability to communicate clearly, effectively, persuasively--to gain understanding, and hopefully, allegiance--should be at the top of the list of skills

> developed by every careerist who wants to get anywhere near the top of most institutions in this country--government, business, education, what have you.[25]

In an effort to improve management education for post-secondary institutions and corporate management education programs, Robert Hahn of the Harvard Graduate School of Education has developed an "Inventory of General Learning Goals of Management." Note the emphasis on communication skills in the top 10 rankings of 25 general learning goals in industry management education:[26]

Rank Order	General Learning Goal
1.5	To develop ability to interact easily and productively with others
1.5	To develop ability to think critically about received ideas
3	To develop ability to balance conflicting viewpoints
4	To develop ability to listen effectively
5	To develop ability to communicate ideas orally
6	To develop self-confidence and self-esteem
7	To develop tolerance and trust in relations with others
8	To develop self-awareness and self-understanding
9	To develop capacity for self-evaluation
10	To develop capacity for assuming responsibility

Note that at least nine of the top ten learning goals identified by Hahn are communication based. Thus, from a broad perspective and, particularly from an upper management viewpoint, communication skills are very important.

How about sharpening the focus from the perspective of the company recruiter looking for recent graduates to fill entry level management

positions? What are the factors essential for enhancement of employability? The Endicott report (1976) suggests that recruiters visiting our college campus cite six factors as critical to the employability of college graduates. Each factor is listed in order of importance.[27]

1. Personal qualifications, including maturity, initiative, enthusiasm, appearance, the ability to work with people, and effective communication, both oral and written.
2. Scholastic qualifications as shown by grades in all subjects or in a major field.
3. Specialized courses relating to a particular field of work.
4. Kind and amount of part-time and summer employment while in college.
5. Experience in campus activities, especially leadership and participation in extra curricular life.
6. General or liberal arts courses designed to provide a broad and cultural background.

These six factors are also validated by those responsible for placing today's graduates.[28] Asked what they look for in job candidates beyond specific academic credentials and relevant work experience, recruiters cite communication skills as very important. The college relations manager for Travenol Laboratories notes, ". . . we place a very high degree of importance on communication skills. Verbal and written skills are essential for a successful career at our company."[29]

Thus far we have punctuated the general importance of a variety of communication skills to specific jobs. Perhaps these skills can best be identified in the DiSalvo, Larsen and Seiler study aimed at identifying the communication skills needed by recent college graduates in business organizations. On the basis of their survey, the authors concluded that ten types of communication skills were important to job success:[30]

1. advising
2. persuading
3. instructing
4. interviewing
5. routine information exchange
6. public speaking
7. small group leadership
8. giving orders
9. small group problem solving
10. listening.

Hanna, in an effort to discover (1) what should be stressed in speech communication courses not now stressed, (2) what should be deleted, and (3) what instruction should be continued with even greater emphasis, summarized his findings by saying:

> If teachers wish to teach courses which are oriented toward career training in the business community, the communication skills involved in motivating people, delegating authority, listening, direction giving and group problem solving should be stressed.[31]

The Task Ahead

While it is not fair to claim that any student's career lies in the hands of another, as educators we cannot shirk our responsibilities to students for informing them of the high correlation between communication skills and employability. A worker without mastery of communication skills or the ability to work with people, if employed at all, will often find his/her path to promotion blocked. If not employed, that same worker will likely have greater problems acquiring fulfilling employment. Can we live with that on

our consciences and make no effort to review and/or restructure our curriculum to better meet the needs of industry? Cervantes said, "forewarned is forearmed." Most of us in the discipline are well aware of the facts and findings we have cited thus far and probably could summon equally convincing or more compelling evidence concerning the importance of communication in job-related skills. What, then, prevents us from making every effort we can to insure a sound quality curriculum for our graduates? Does the fear of condemnation from more traditionally oriented colleagues distort our vision? Cannot there be rigor in a skills oriented program? What are some possible obstacles to future investigation in restructuring our curriculum to include a course and/or program with a communication training end product? While the list is certainly not all-inclusive, we believe several issues and stereotypes must be resolved for education and training to successfully converge.

Possible Obstacles

1. The view that we did not have such courses in our own graduate program and thus do not feel qualified to develop and/or teach the courses.

2. The view that we are shifting our goals from research and education to training or trade.

3. The view that training techniques are a fad or frill that will disappear during economically troubled times and/or an enlightened age.

4. The view that there is little difference between training and teaching; thus, anyone steeped in the discipline of communication can do both.

5. A failure to distinguish between andragogy and pedagogy and the unique problems of and approaches necessary for each of these two learning environments.

6. A belief that the effort to be concerned with the non-academic career relevance of the education we provide will not enrich our discipline's scholarly and educational activities.

7. A belief that we are wasting our time as change agents, since many business, industrial and governmental agencies stereotype communication majors as voice and diction people with few useful business skills.

For our communication majors to make a significant contribution to industrial training needs, we believe these aforementioned obstacles must be eradicated. The perception that a training modality prostitutes research and rigor is unfortunate. The notion that training is a "flash in the pan" that will fade away for whatever reason is nonproductive. While we believe teaching and training have commonality, ample evidence exists to suggest that each activity requires distinct methods and skills that often limit cross-over without a thorough understanding of the learning principles unique to each population of students. Change is difficult for most of us; thus, andragogy, the act and science of helping adults to learn, is a difficult orientation for most of us to master. But we believe we do not deserve the label of educator if we adopt the view that we cannot learn from other disciplines. Finally, to be employable, our majors must overcome traditional stereotypes. Perceptions of useless skills must be overcome by increasing the awareness of business, governmental, industrial, and educational agencies of well-designed academic programs which produce communication skills that increase employee productivity and morale.

The speech communication discipline has a long tradition of developing competent teachers of communication. Communication Education is one of the most widely circulated and read professional communication journals in America. Many communication instructors list instructional development as one of their key academic interests. Courses focusing on methods and problems of teaching speech communication have, until recently, been standard core curriculum at most colleges and universities. But with the national decline

in students pursuing careers in the teaching profession in general, and speech communication instruction in particular, instruction in speech education has declined significantly. While it is true that our expertise has focused on methods of teaching secondary school students, we also have the talents and resources to focus on teaching the adult learner (andragogy).

Our call to implement curricular modifications in the speech communication programs to prepare students for a variety of careers is not original. Brubaker suggests, "We need to realize that our exclusive job is not cloning, producing future brilliant professors for research at leading institutions of higher learning."[32] King recommends that we attract more students to areas of communication where the prospects for non-academic employment are good.[33] We suggest that broadening the scope of the traditional approaches to speech education curricula can result in students who are better prepared to capitalize on the need for communication education in business and industry. We do not claim that developing curricula which emphasize communication training is the only way to meet the needs of both students and business and industry. Such curriculum development can, however, build on the speech education tradition to provide students with marketable knowledge. Students who emerge from our undergraduate and graduate speech communication programs have valuable insights and information which can foster improved communication in a variety of contexts. Besides teaching them the theory, research methodology and skills of human communication, should we not also give them skills for transferring their knowledge to others? Even if most of our students do not choose careers in human resource development, we believe they should be given appropriate tools for serving as trainer/change agent, regardless of their formal job titles and descriptions. Students should not put their knowledge about human communication under a bushel.

Providing them with training skills will equip them to shed light on a variety of communication issues and problems.

In most cases entire curriculum changes need not occur. The focus of the traditional speech methods course could be expanded to include units on conducting seminars, workshops and comprehensive training programs. Additional emphasis could be placed on those topics unique to training (e.g., developing a training proposal, understanding the characteristics of adult learners, marketing communication training, and discussing content areas such as speaking skills, listening, conflict management, nonverbal communication, etc. that would be appropriate for organizational training).

In addition to modifying existing speech education courses, existing courses in organizational communication could also be expanded to include a unit in training and development. Two widely used organizational communication texts include at least one chapter each on training.[34]

Some departments, rather than modifying the emphasis of existing speech education or organizational communication courses, may wish to propose new courses to help students become better equipped to enter the training and development arena. A senior level course that can be taken by both graduates and undergraduates offers maximum curricular flexibility. Such a course could also be of interest to those responsible for programs in instructional technology and industrial psychology.

Contacts with the local chapter of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) may result in an additional market for your graduate and/or undergraduate program in training and human resource development. Often individuals in corporate training and development departments are there because they have demonstrated superior job performance. But just because they excel in salesmanship or production does not mean they will be effective

trainers. Often they lack instruction in how to develop talent and skills in others. A course or courses which include instruction in training others may be of interest to those already in the training and human resource development field.

Unfortunately, Heath argues, ". . . communication in general and speech communication progress in particular have been reactionary, following industry rather than being at the cutting edge."[35] Perhaps it is time we become more prevalent in industry. It behooves the communication educator to be more aware of this trend, to assess the impact, strengths and weaknesses of what is happening, and to determine the potential contributions of academia to training, and of training to academia. Perhaps our program today will be one small step for education and training and one giant step for the ultimate beneficiaries-- our students and the persons they train.

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